



Depictions of Violence and Criminality: Youth Implications in Contemporary Malayalam Cinema (2021–2024)

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Abstract— This study investigates six Malayalam films from 2021–2024—*Aavesham*, *Marco*, *Bheeshma Parvam*, *RDX*, *Turbo*, and *Kannur Squad*—to analyze depictions of violence and criminality and their potential effects on youth aged 13–25. Collectively earning over ₹600 crore, these films signify Kerala’s evolving cinematic landscape. Employing a qualitative content approach, the study integrates direct film analysis with critical reviews from prominent newspapers. Organized thematically from gangsterism to vigilantism, it identifies a violence range (6–12 incidents/hour) and diverse criminal archetypes. Findings indicate varied youth responses, from aggression modeling to resilience, underscoring the need for media literacy given Kerala’s mental health context, evaluated through established psychological perspectives



Keywords— Malayalam Cinema, Violence, Criminality, Youth Influence, Kerala

I. INTRODUCTION

The pervasive presence of violence in cinematic narratives has long been a subject of scrutiny, with growing concerns about its potential to shape human behavior, particularly among young audiences. In recent years, Malayalam cinema has undergone a notable shift toward violent and criminal themes, exemplified by films such as *Marco* (2024), described as a visceral gangster thriller (The Hindu, 2024a), and *Aavesham* (2024), whose flamboyant gangster protagonist has sparked widespread cultural resonance (The News Minute, 2024b). This trend aligns with broader societal developments in Kerala, where the Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) reports a suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021—exceeding the national average of 12.0—with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected, alongside significant psychological distress and interpersonal conflicts (31.3%) among youth (National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). These statistics underscore a pressing context for examining media’s role, as violent cinematic portrayals may intersect with such vulnerabilities, prompting public discourse on their influence. This study investigates the portrayal of violence and criminality in six

popular Malayalam films from 2021 to 2024—*Aavesham* (2024), *Marco* (2024), *Bheeshma Parvam* (2022), *RDX: Robert Dony Xavier* (2023), *Turbo* (2024), and *Kannur Squad* (2023)—and assesses their potential influence on young viewers aged 13–25, situating this analysis within a robust body of global research on media violence and its behavioral impacts. These films are sequenced thematically, beginning with gangsterism (*Aavesham*, *Marco*, *Bheeshma Parvam*) and progressing to vigilantism (*RDX*, *Turbo*, *Kannur Squad*), to reflect the evolution of criminality portrayals and their varying effects on youth perceptions.

Decades of psychological and sociological research have established a correlation between exposure to violent media, including films, and increased aggressive behavior, particularly among children and adolescents. Early experimental work by Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1961) demonstrated that children observing aggressive behavior in a film were more likely to imitate it, with significant behavioral shifts observed in controlled settings (Bandura et al., 1961). This foundational finding underpins Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals learn

behaviors through observation and imitation, especially when violence is rewarded or justified (Bandura, 1977). Subsequent meta-analyses have quantified this relationship: Paik and Comstock (1994) reviewed 217 studies, finding a moderate correlation ($r = .38$) between television and film violence and aggression in experimental settings, with a smaller but significant effect ($r = .19$) in longitudinal and cross-sectional data, and a specific effect size of $r = .32$ for physical violence, suggesting a tangible risk extending to real-world behaviors (Paik & Comstock, 1994).

Longitudinal research further illuminates the enduring impact of media violence. Huesmann et al. (2003) tracked individuals over 22 years, finding that childhood exposure to violent television predicted increased aggression in adulthood, with high viewers significantly more likely to engage in violent acts—e.g., 42% of males pushed their spouse (vs. 22% for low viewers), and 17% of females punched or choked their spouse (vs. 4%) (Huesmann et al., 2003). These findings align with Social Cognitive Theory, which argues that repeated exposure fosters aggressive scripts and desensitization, normalizing violence as a problem-solving mechanism (Huesmann, 1986). Cultivation Theory complements this, suggesting that heavy media consumption cultivates a “mean world syndrome,” where viewers perceive reality as more violent, potentially amplifying aggressive tendencies (Gerbner et al., 1980). The General Aggression Model (GAM) integrates these mechanisms, proposing that media violence primes aggressive thoughts, increases arousal, and shapes long-term beliefs about violence’s acceptability (Anderson & Bushman, 2002).

Globally, evidence is consistent across cultures. Anderson et al. (2017) conducted a cross-cultural study across seven countries (e.g., Australia, Japan, U.S.), confirming that violent media exposure correlates with aggression, with effect sizes mirroring earlier findings (Anderson et al., 2017). Short-term effects include priming—where violent content activates aggressive cognitions—and mimicry, particularly among children, while long-term exposure leads to desensitization and script learning (Carnagey et al., 2007). Adolescents are especially vulnerable due to their developmental stage and high media consumption, averaging 7 hours and 22 minutes daily for teens aged 13–18 (Rideout & Robb, 2019). Demographic factors amplify this risk: males, older children, and those from minority backgrounds with less-educated parents are more exposed and susceptible (Gentile et al., 2004).

Despite this robust evidence, the field remains contentious. Critics argue that effect sizes ($r = .20$ – $.30$) are modest, with genetics, family environment, and socioeconomic status exerting stronger influences (Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010).

Methodological critiques highlight failures to control for confounding variables or distinguish minor aggression (e.g., verbal outbursts) from serious violence, with some studies showing no significant link (Freedman, 2002). The Catalyst Model posits that media violence plays a stylistic rather than motivational role, overshadowed by innate and social factors (Ferguson, 2015). This debate underscores the complexity of isolating media’s impact, yet even small effects warrant attention given their societal scale. Anderson et al. (2003) compare the correlation between media violence and aggression to that between smoking and lung cancer ($r \approx .20$ – $.30$), a link that spurred major public health interventions (Anderson et al., 2003). In the U.S., firearm injuries—partly tied to violence exposure—cost \$48 billion annually, with over 32,000 deaths (Fowler et al., 2015), illustrating the public health stakes.

In Kerala, global concerns about media violence resonate with local debates over Malayalam cinema’s aggressive shift. Films like *RDX* (2023), lauded for its martial arts spectacle (The News Minute, 2023a), and *Marco* (2024), noted for visceral revenge (The Hindu, 2024a), mirror international patterns of media influence. This study analyzes these six films using reviews from English (*The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The News Minute*, *Times of India*, *India Today*, *New Indian Express*) and Malayalam (*Mathrubhumi*, *Malayala Manorama*) sources to explore violence and criminality patterns. Applying Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), and desensitization research (Carnagey et al., 2007), it assesses their potential to shape youth attitudes (13–25), offering a critical lens on cinema’s evolving role in Kerala’s social landscape without claiming causation.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study investigates contemporary Malayalam films from 2021–2024, selected for their thematic diversity, violence spectrum (~6–12 incidents per hour), and cultural impact, as evidenced by box office earnings ranging from ₹70–150 crore and critical acclaim from prominent sources such as *The Hindu* and *The News Minute* (The Hindu, 2022a; The Hindu, 2023a; The Hindu, 2023b; The Hindu, 2024a; The Hindu, 2024b; The Hindu, 2024c; The News Minute, 2023a; The News Minute, 2023b; The News Minute, 2024a; The News Minute, 2024b; The News Minute, 2024c). The six films—*Avesham* (2024), *Marco* (2024), *Bheeshma Parvam* (2022), *RDX: Robert Dony Xavier* (2023), *Turbo* (2024), and *Kannur Squad* (2023)—span genres from gangster comedy to cop thriller, capturing Kerala’s cinematic evolution post-COVID and reflecting youth exposure (13–25) through relatable settings and star power, including Mammootty and Fahadh Faasil (Kerala

State Youth Commission, 2023). Narrower genres, such as superhero narratives like *Minnal Murali*, were excluded to prioritize works with broad societal influence, aligning with qualitative research principles that emphasize depth and context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A qualitative content approach examines portrayals of violence and criminality through a dual lens: direct analysis of the films' content and insights drawn from critical reviews in English (*The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The News Minute*, *Times of India*, *India Today*, *New Indian Express*) and Malayalam (*Mathrubhumi*, *Malayala Manorama*) newspapers. The film content analysis assesses violence frequency, type, and narrative context, alongside criminality themes such as gangsterism, vigilantism, and corruption, providing a foundational understanding of each work's thematic structure. This is complemented by reviews, which offer cultural reception perspectives and critical interpretations, enriching the analysis with external viewpoints on societal impact (The Hindu, 2024a; Times of India, 2024a). Violence incidents per hour were calculated by dividing the total number of acts—derived from detailed examination of the films and corroborated by review descriptions—by their runtime, ensuring precision and consistency across all six analyses (e.g., *Marco*'s 10–12/hour, *Aavesham*'s 7–8/hour).

The sequence of analysis—*Aavesham*, *Marco*, *Bheeshma Parvam*, *RDX*, *Turbo*, *Kannur Squad*—is structured thematically to enhance coherence and comparative insight into criminality's portrayal and its influence on youth. The first three films (*Aavesham*, *Marco*, *Bheeshma Parvam*) explore gangsterism, presenting criminal underworlds with varying violence intensities: moderate (7–8/hour), high (10–12/hour), and low (6–7/hour), respectively, reflecting the allure and complexity of such narratives (Mathrubhumi, 2024a). The subsequent three (*RDX*, *Turbo*, *Kannur Squad*) focus on vigilantism, showcasing justice-driven responses from high (11–12/hour) to moderate (8–9/hour) to low (6–7/hour) violence, emphasizing moral grounding and societal duty (The News Minute, 2023a). This progression from gangsterism's potential glamorization to vigilantism's righteous action mirrors the study's examination of criminality's dual nature—glamorous versus justified—and its varying effects on youth perceptions, facilitating a logical flow that aligns with the thematic synthesis in the discussion (Nair, 2020). Psychological frameworks—Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), and desensitization research (Carnagey et al., 2007)—evaluate potential youth influence, exploring how these portrayals might model aggression, normalize violence, or alter sensitivity thresholds. Each film receives a comprehensive analysis synthesizing these findings, situating cinema's societal role within Kerala's

youth media trends, as informed by regional mental health data (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). This method delivers a robust, context-driven examination, avoiding claims of direct causation while leveraging both intrinsic content and extrinsic critique for a holistic perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

III. ANALYSIS

This section analyzes the portrayal of violence and criminality in aforementioned six Malayalam films and assesses their potential influence on youth aged 13–25, drawing on critical reviews from English (*The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The News Minute*, *Times of India*, *India Today*, *New Indian Express*) and Malayalam (*Mathrubhumi*, *Malayala Manorama*) sources. Each film's violence frequency, type, and context, along with criminality themes, are examined using Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), and desensitization research (Carnagey et al., 2007), contextualized by Kerala's youth mental health data (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Aavesham (2024)

Aavesham, directed by Jithu Madhavan and released on April 11, 2024, is a Malayalam gangster comedy that grossed over ₹150 crore, underscoring its cultural impact (Manorama Online, 2024a). Starring Fahadh Faasil as Ranga, a flamboyant Bengaluru don, the film follows three college students—Bibi, Santhan, and Aju—who enlist his aid to avenge a brutal ragging incident by seniors (Times of India, 2024a). With a 2-hour-38-minute runtime (158 minutes, verified via SRT) and a UA rating, it blends action and humor, earning acclaim for its “electrifying” sequences and Faasil's “towering performance” (India Today, 2024a). Critics laud its “crowd-pleasing antics” (Mathrubhumi, 2024a) and Faasil's “uninhibited act” that carries a thinly plotted narrative (The Hindu, 2024a). Its appeal to youth aged 15–35 mirrors Kerala's cinematic trends, akin to *Romancham* and *Premalu* (Manorama Online, 2024a).

Violence in *Aavesham* averages approximately 7–8 incidents per hour, totaling around 18 physical acts—slaps, punches, and beatings—often presented comically, such as Ranga's “slow beating” directive (Manorama Online, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024a). Compared to *Marco* (~10–12/hour) or *Kannur Squad* (~6–7/hour), its violence is moderate (Times of India, 2024a). A standout scene features Ranga fighting 100 opponents, described as “exceptionally intense” yet bloodless, unlike *RDX*'s martial flair (Manorama Online, 2024a). The Hindu (2024a) notes tension peaks not in fights but during a dumb charades game, highlighting its unconventional approach. The stylized, non-graphic violence, driven by student rivalries

escalating to gang conflicts, likely reduces desensitization risks compared to gorier depictions (Times of India, 2024a; Carnagey et al., 2007). This aligns with the Kerala State Youth Commission's (2023) finding that hanging, a prevalent yet bloodless suicide method (76.6%), reflects cultural familiarity with less graphic violence portrayals (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality revolves around gangsterism, petty crime, and loyalty, with Ranga's "empire" implied but not fully depicted, focusing on his charismatic persona (India Today, 2024a). He shifts from a formidable don to a protector, aiding the students' vengeance with a light-hearted tone, contrasting *Bheeshma Parvam*'s darker underworld (Times of India, 2024a). Critics describe him as having a "heart of gold," romanticizing his outlaw status through humor (Manorama Online, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024a), though *The Hindu* (2024a) praises the ambiguity in his character, revealed in scenes like the dumb charades sequence, distinguishing him from *Marco*'s ruthlessness or *Kannur Squad*'s critique (The Hindu, 2024a). The students' brief engagement in criminal acts, like hiring Ranga for "contract fights," leads to consequences such as failing exams, adding narrative weight (Times of India, 2024a). This resonates with the Kerala State Youth Commission's (2023) observation that interpersonal issues (e.g., toxic relationships, 31.3%) and educational pressures contribute to youth distress (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Aavesham's influence on youth aged 15–35 is moderate-to-high, driven by its college setting and Fahadh Faasil's "teen idol" status, resonating with audiences (Manorama Online, 2024a). Social Learning Theory suggests Ranga's rewarded aggression—celebrated in triumphant fight scenes—may model violence as a solution to peer conflicts like ragging (Bandura, 1977). Cultivation Theory indicates its ~7–8 violent incidents per hour could normalize aggression, though humor lessens the impact compared to *Marco*'s gore (Gerbner et al., 1980). The non-graphic violence mitigates desensitization risks (Carnagey et al., 2007). However, *The Hindu* (2024a) notes a post-interval lull as the film shifts from hero worship to a cautionary tale, while Mathrubhumi (2024a) highlights its "unique tonal balance," suggesting a nuanced influence (India Today, 2024a; Times of India, 2024a). Ranga's glamorized gangster image, paired with relatable young actors, may encourage viewing criminal solutions favorably, despite academic consequences (India Today, 2024a; Times of India, 2024a). This aligns with the Kerala State Youth Commission's (2023) findings that youth with low education (SSLC and plus two, 62.4%) and psychological distress are at higher suicide risk, with 79.3% having close family ties yet succumbing to external stressors (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Kerala's suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021 exceeds the national average of 12.0, with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). Ragging, a trigger in the film, mirrors interpersonal conflicts linked to 31.3% of suicides, while the survey's focus on addiction and financial crises contrasts with *Aavesham*'s lighter tone, yet underscores its relevance to youth facing distress (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). Unlike *RDX*'s intense action or *Kannur Squad*'s duty-driven narrative, *Aavesham* stands out for its humorous anti-hero, blending violence and criminality accessibly. Its tonal balance—less brutal than *Marco* and less restrained than *Kannur Squad*—marks it as a unique entry in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID landscape, meriting further study given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; Mathrubhumi, 2024a).

Aavesham weaves stylized violence and romanticized criminality with humor, posing risks of modeling aggression among youth while curbing desensitization through its non-graphic approach. Its college setting and star power heighten its appeal, potentially glamorizing criminal solutions to distress, though a shift to cautionary tones and academic consequences add nuance (The Hindu, 2024a). In Kerala, where suicide rates are high and linked to education and interpersonal issues, the film's influence warrants deeper exploration of its societal role in the cinematic context (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

***Marco* (2024)**

Marco, directed by Haneef Adeni and released on December 20, 2024, is a Malayalam gangster thriller that grossed over ₹100 crore, reflecting its commercial success despite polarizing reviews (The Hindu, 2024a). Starring Unni Mukundan as Marco Jr., the film traces his vengeful rampage following his family's murder, set in Kerala's underworld. With a 2-hour-24-minute runtime (144 minutes, verified via SRT) and an A rating, it diverges from *Aavesham*'s humor and *Kannur Squad*'s duty-driven narrative, embracing raw aggression. Critics praise its "unapologetic gore" (Malayala Manorama, 2024a) and "visceral intensity" (Mathrubhumi, 2024a), with Mukundan's "ferocious anti-hero" turn lauded as a 2024 standout (The News Minute, 2024a). However, reviews like *The Hindu* (2024a) and *New Indian Express* (2024a) criticize its weak script and excessive violence, labeling it a "dark chapter" in Indian cinema (Times of India, 2024a).

Violence in *Marco* averages 10–12 incidents per hour, totaling approximately 25 acts across its runtime, the highest among the six films analyzed (The Hindu, 2024a). Specific scenes include stabbings, massacres, and extreme acts like the murder of a pregnant woman and a child's head

smashed with a gas cylinder (Indian Express, 2024a; Times of India, 2024a). Surpassing *Aavesham*'s 7–8 incidents per hour and aligning with *RDX*'s frequency, its graphic nature exceeds both, driven by revenge after family betrayal and gang supremacy (The News Minute, 2024a). Critics note its “pure sadism” lacks *Turbo*'s stylization or *Aavesham*'s comedy (Times of India, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024a), with director VC Abhilash calling it a “dark chapter in Indian cinema history” (Times of India, 2024a). This graphic portrayal, termed “unprecedented” in Indian cinema (Malayala Manorama, 2024a), aligns with studies on cinematic violence amplifying aggression (Bushman & Anderson, 2009). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) reports hanging (76.6%) as a prevalent suicide method, suggesting a cultural tolerance for violent imagery that *Marco* intensifies (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality in *Marco* centers on organized crime, murder, and betrayal, with *Marco* entrenched in Kerala's underworld (The News Minute, 2024a). His family's legacy fuels a murder spree, more savage than *Bheeshma Parvam*'s conflicts (The Hindu, 2024a). Betrayal drives his vendetta, contrasting *Aavesham*'s lighter tone (The Hindu, 2024a). Critics portray him as a “tragic avenger,” romanticizing his brutality without *Turbo*'s justice or *Kannur Squad*'s critique (Malayala Manorama, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024a), amplifying his outlaw allure devoid of moral restraint (The South First, 2024a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) links interpersonal issues (e.g., toxic relationships, 31.3%) to youth suicide, suggesting *Marco*'s betrayal theme resonates with real stressors (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Marco's influence on youth aged 13–25 is high, intensified by its graphic content and A rating, restricting it to adults yet accessible to teens via cultural reach (India Today, 2024b). Social Learning Theory posits that its rewarded brutality models extreme aggression, appealing to identity conflicts (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1968). Cultivation Theory suggests its ~10–12 violent incidents per hour normalize gore, exceeding *Aavesham*'s impact (Gerbner et al., 1980; The News Minute, 2024a). Desensitization risks peak with graphic acts unmitigated by humor (Carnagey et al., 2007; New Indian Express, 2024a). Critics highlight its “teen fascination” and “ferocious appeal,” risking mimicry without *RDX*'s moral buffer (Mathrubhumi, 2024a; Malayala Manorama, 2024a), with Mukundan defending its realism as reflecting societal violence (Times of India, 2024b). Kerala's setting heightens relatability (The News Minute, 2024a). Kerala's suicide rate (27.2 per lakh in 2021) exceeds the national average (12.0), with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records

Bureau, 2021). Psychological distress (noted in a significant percentage of victims) and interpersonal conflicts (31.3%) align with *Marco*'s themes, potentially triggering vulnerable youth (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). Despite 79.3% of victims having close family ties, external stressors prevail, suggesting *Marco*'s intense narrative could exacerbate risks (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Unlike *Aavesham*'s humor-tempered violence or *Bheeshma Parvam*'s restraint, *Marco*'s unrelenting gore and lack of moral nuance pose higher risks. Compared to *Kannur Squad*'s duty focus or *RDX*'s protective undertones, it stands as a visceral outlier in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID evolution, meriting scrutiny given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; The News Minute, 2024a). *Marco* blends intense violence and unrepentant criminality, posing a high risk of modeling aggression and desensitizing youth. Its commercial success and Kerala setting amplify its influence, potentially resonating with real-world stressors like betrayal and distress identified in Kerala's youth (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). Lacking mitigating factors of humor or morality, its societal impact warrants further study.

***Bheeshma Parvam* (2022)**

Bheeshma Parvam, directed by Amal Neerad, premiered on March 3, 2022, as a Malayalam gangster drama, grossing over ₹100 crore (The Hindu, 2022a). Starring Mammooty as Michael, patriarch of Kochi's Anjootty family, it explores power, betrayal, and revenge amid rival factions. Set in Kerala's coastal underworld, it blends stylized action with emotional depth, earning acclaim for Mammooty's “godfather aura” and “cult appeal” (Mathrubhumi, 2022a; The Hindu, 2022a). Critics praise its “emotional resonance” (The News Minute, 2022a), distinguishing it from *Marco*'s brutality and *Turbo*'s humor, with a 2-hour-24-minute runtime (144 minutes, verified via SRT) and a UA rating (The Hindu, 2022a).

Violence averages ~6–7 incidents per hour across its 2-hour-24-minute runtime, aligning with *Kannur Squad* but below *RDX*'s ~11–12/hour and *Marco*'s ~10–12/hour, with ~15 acts (The Hindu, 2023a; The Hindu, 2023b; The Hindu, 2024a). It features restrained physical beatings and murders, plus threats like “cut you up,” avoiding *Marco*'s gore or *RDX*'s martial flair (Mathrubhumi, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2023a; Bushman & Anderson, 2009). Driven by family power and revenge—Michael's discipline and Ajaz's vendetta—it contrasts *Turbo*'s protection (The News Minute, 2022a; The News Minute, 2024a). Violence is glorified with emotional restraint, unlike *Marco*'s excess (Malayala Manorama, 2022a). *Times of India* (2022a) rates

it 3.5/5 for its slick execution, noting minimal violence serves emotional stakes (Times of India, 2022a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) reports hanging as a prevalent suicide method (76.6%), suggesting cultural familiarity with restrained violent imagery that *Bheeshma Parvam* reflects (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality focuses on gangsterism, murder, and corruption, with Michael's underworld reign echoing *Aavesham*'s Ranga (The Hindu, 2024b). Murders and political graft fuel the plot, akin to *Kannur Squad*'s critique but distinct from *Turbo*'s vigilantism (The Hindu, 2023a; The News Minute, 2024a). Critics note Michael's "noble gangster" persona, romanticized yet tempered by loyalty, contrasting *Marco*'s unrepentant savagery (Mathrubhumi, 2022a; Malayala Manorama, 2024a). Betrayal adds moral clarity, unlike *Aavesham*'s playful crime (The News Minute, 2022a; The Hindu, 2024b). *Times of India* (2022a) highlights family power struggles, suggesting resonance with youth facing relational dynamics (Times of India, 2022a).

Bheeshma Parvam's influence on youth aged 13–25 is moderate, driven by Mammootty's star power and UA-rated accessibility (The Hindu, 2022a). Social Learning Theory suggests Michael's rewarded power models authoritative aggression, appealing to identity struggles (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1968). Cultivation Theory indicates its ~6–7/hour violence could normalize gang dynamics, less intense than *RDX* (Gerbner et al., 1980; The News Minute, 2023a). Desensitization is limited by restraint, unlike *Marco*'s graphic impact (Carnagey et al., 2007; The Hindu, 2024a). Its "cult appeal" risks mimicry, tempered by emotional depth, with Kochi's setting boosting relatability (The Hindu, 2022a; Malayala Manorama, 2022a). It contrasts *Turbo*'s humor and *Aavesham*'s satire (The News Minute, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024c). *Manorama Online* (2022a) notes strong youth engagement via audience reviews (Manorama Online, 2022a). Kerala's suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021 exceeds the national average of 12.0, with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). Psychological distress (significant percentage), low education (62.4%), and interpersonal conflicts (31.3%) are key factors, with 79.3% of victims having close family ties yet succumbing (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). *Bheeshma Parvam*'s themes of power and loyalty might resonate with youth facing distress, potentially modeling authority as a coping mechanism, though its restraint could mitigate negative effects (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Unlike *Aavesham*'s satire or *Marco*'s gore, *Bheeshma Parvam*'s restrained violence and romanticized criminality,

balanced by emotion, pose a notable youth influence, modeling aggression with restraint (The News Minute, 2022a). Its nuanced anti-hero narrative distinguishes it from *Marco*'s brutality and *Kannur Squad*'s duty, meriting further exploration in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID evolution given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

***RDX: Robert Dony Xavier* (2023)**

RDX: Robert Dony Xavier, directed by Nahas Hidayath, premiered on August 25, 2023, as a Malayalam action film, grossing over ₹80 crore and establishing its commercial success (The Hindu, 2023a). Starring Shane Nigam, Antony Varghese, and Neeraj Madhav as martial artist brothers—Robert, Dony, and Xavier—it depicts their violent retaliation against Paulson's gang after a family attack during a Kerala church festival. With a 2-hour-30-minute runtime (150 minutes, verified via SRT) and a UA rating, it blends high-octane action with familial loyalty, earning praise for "stylized, crowd-pleasing action" and "adrenaline-pumping justice" (The Hindu, 2023a; The News Minute, 2023a). Critics highlight its choreography and emotional resonance, with *Times of India* (2023a) and *Indian Express* (2023a) rating it 3.5/5, while *Mathrubhumi* (2023a) notes its appeal as an Onam festive hit for youth.

Violence in *RDX* averages ~11–12 incidents per hour across its 2-hour-30-minute runtime, among the highest of the six films, with ~25 acts escalating to ~28 (The Hindu, 2023a). It rivals *Marco*'s ~10–12/hour and exceeds *Aavesham*'s ~7–8/hour, featuring physical combat—punches, knifeplay, and threats like "eternal sleep" (Mathrubhumi, 2023a; The Hindu, 2024b). Unlike *Marco*'s gore or *Aavesham*'s comedy, *RDX*'s martial artistry is stylized, driven by family defense and gang rivalry (The News Minute, 2023a; Bushman & Anderson, 2009). Violence is glorified as heroic, tempered by a protective narrative, contrasting *Marco*'s brutality with moral grounding (Malayala Manorama, 2023a; The Hindu, 2024a). *Indian Express* (2023a) praises its explosive sequences, while *The Hindu* (2023a) critiques its depiction of economically disadvantaged colony residents as violent hooligans, raising social implications (The Hindu, 2023a). *Times of India* (2023a) questions whether it glorifies rage amid post-COVID youth crime trends (Times of India, 2023a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) notes hanging as a prevalent suicide method (76.6%), indicating cultural familiarity with violent imagery that *RDX* stylizes rather than intensifies graphically (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality centers on vigilantism, gang activity, and revenge, with Paulson's hooch-dealing gang sparking the brothers' street justice (The Hindu, 2023a). It mirrors

Bheeshma Parvam's underworld but lacks *Aavesham*'s playfulness (The Hindu, 2022a; The News Minute, 2024a). Critics note its "righteous" vigilantism, contrasting *Marco*'s unrepentant crime with a condemned gang (The News Minute, 2023a; Mathrubhumi, 2024b). This moral duality distinguishes it from *Kannur Squad*'s systemic focus (The Hindu, 2023b). *Indian Express* (2023a) praises its balanced screenplay ensuring all leads' significance, enhancing its narrative of justice (Indian Express, 2023a). *Times of India* (2023a) highlights its righteous undertone, reinforcing the moral grounding of the brothers' actions (Times of India, 2023a).

RDX's influence on youth aged 13–25 is high, driven by its intense action and mass appeal, suitable for festive season viewing with a UA rating (Times of India, 2023a). Social Learning Theory suggests its rewarded violence models aggression as family protection, appealing to loyalty instincts (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1968). Cultivation Theory indicates its ~11–12 violent incidents per hour normalize combat, surpassing *Aavesham* and nearing *Marco* (Gerbner et al., 1980; The Hindu, 2024a). Desensitization risks are moderate, less graphic than *Marco* (Carnagey et al., 2007; Malayala Manorama, 2024a). Its "cool factor" and Kerala festival setting boost relatability, risking imitation, though family ties temper excess unlike *Marco*'s brutality (Mathrubhumi, 2023a; The News Minute, 2024a). *Indian Express* (2023a) commends its mass appeal to youth craving action (Indian Express, 2023a), while *Times of India* (2023a) questions its glorification of rage amidst rising youth crime post-COVID (Times of India, 2023a). Kerala's suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021 exceeds the national average of 12.0, with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) identifies psychological distress (noted in a significant percentage), interpersonal conflicts (31.3%), and low education (62.4%) as key factors, with 79.3% of victims having close family ties yet succumbing to external stressors (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). *RDX*'s themes of family defense and community violence during festivals could resonate with these vulnerabilities, potentially modeling aggression as a coping mechanism (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). However, its moral framework and emphasis on loyalty might counterbalance this by reinforcing protective values, contrasting *Marco*'s nihilism (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Unlike *RDX*'s intense action or *Kannur Squad*'s duty-driven narrative, *RDX* distinguishes itself with high violence and heroic vigilantism, posing a strong youth influence with moderate desensitization risks due to its stylized approach (The News Minute, 2023a). Compared to

Marco's unrelenting gore or *Kannur Squad*'s restrained narrative, *RDX* balances action with emotional stakes, marking it as a potent entry in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID evolution, warranting further study given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; The News Minute, 2023a). In brief, *RDX*'s high violence and heroic vigilantism pose a strong youth influence, modeling aggression with moral restraint, unlike *Aavesham*'s playfulness or *Turbo*'s justice. Its emotional stakes enhance its potency in Malayalam cinema (The Hindu, 2023a).

***Turbo* (2024)**

Turbo, directed by Vysakh, premiered on May 23, 2024, as a Malayalam action-comedy, grossing over ₹70 crore, affirming its commercial success (The Hindu, 2024c). Starring Mammooty as Turbo Jose, an Idukki jeep driver turned vigilante, the film follows his fight against a Chennai banking scam after a family-targeted attack. Set across Kerala's festive backdrop and Tamil Nadu's urban sprawl, it blends action with humor, earning acclaim for Mammooty's "youthful energy" and "family-friendly action" (The Hindu, 2024c; The News Minute, 2024a). Critics highlight its "mass appeal" (Mathrubhumi, 2024b), with *Times of India* (2024b) rating it 3/5, though *New Indian Express* (2024a) notes a "vapid" screenplay, distinguishing it from *Marco*'s brutality and *Aavesham*'s satire (Mathrubhumi, 2024b). With a 2-hour-41-minute runtime (161 minutes, verified via SRT) and a UA rating, it targets youth aged 13–25 through relatable settings and star power.

Violence averages ~8–9 incidents per hour across its 2-hour-41-minute runtime, between *RDX*'s ~11–12/hour and *Aavesham*'s ~7–8/hour, with ~20 acts escalating to ~22 (The Hindu, 2023a; The Hindu, 2024b). It includes physical stabbings, beatings, and crashes, plus threats like "chop all your heads off," softened by humor (Mathrubhumi, 2024b). Unlike *Marco*'s gore or *RDX*'s martial precision, *Turbo*'s stylized action—driven by family defense and criminal pursuit—contrasts *Kannur Squad*'s restraint (The News Minute, 2024a; The Hindu, 2023b; Bushman & Anderson, 2009). Violence is glorified as heroic, with a comedic and moral overlay, unlike *Marco*'s unrelenting edge (Malayala Manorama, 2024b). *New Indian Express* (2024a) emphasizes Mammooty's dynamic punches fitting the family-friendly tone (New Indian Express, 2024a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) reports hanging as a prevalent suicide method (76.6%), indicating cultural familiarity with violent imagery that *Turbo* stylizes rather than escalates graphically (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality revolves around kidnapping, gang activity, and vigilantism, with Vetrivel's scam and abduction sparking

Jose's justice-driven response (The Hindu, 2024c). It echoes *Bheeshma Parvam*'s organized crime but contrasts *Aavesham*'s pettiness (The Hindu, 2022a; The News Minute, 2024a). Critics praise Jose's "Robin Hood vibes," romanticizing vigilantism while condemning Vetrivel, offering moral clarity absent in *Marco* (Mathrubhumi, 2024b; Malayala Manorama, 2024b). This balances *RDX*'s righteousness with a lighter tone (The News Minute, 2023a). *The News Minute* (2024a) notes its protective rather than nihilistic stance, aligning with societal values (The News Minute, 2024a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) identifies interpersonal conflicts (31.3%) as a suicide factor, suggesting *Turbo*'s family-centric justice narrative may resonate with youth facing relational stressors (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Turbo's influence on youth aged 13–25 is moderate-to-high, fueled by Mammootty's star power and its UA rating, making it accessible during festive seasons (Times of India, 2024b). Social Learning Theory suggests Jose's rewarded feats model protective aggression, appealing to loyalty instincts (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1968). Cultivation Theory indicates its ~8–9/hour violence normalizes duty-bound action, less intense than *RDX* but above *Kannur Squad* (Gerbner et al., 1980; The News Minute, 2023b). Desensitization is limited by humor, unlike *Marco*'s graphic impact (Carnagey et al., 2007; The Hindu, 2024c). Its "youthful energy" and "teen idol" status risk imitation, tempered by family focus (The Hindu, 2024c; Malayala Manorama, 2024b). *The News Minute* (2024a) highlights its mass appeal, potentially offering escapism for youth (The News Minute, 2024a). Kerala's suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021 exceeds the national average of 12.0, with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). Psychological distress (noted in a significant percentage), low education (62.4%), and interpersonal issues (31.3%) are prevalent, with 79.3% of victims having close family ties yet succumbing (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). *Turbo*'s protective vigilante could model coping for youth under stress, with humor potentially mitigating negative effects, contrasting *Marco*'s intensity (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Unlike *Aavesham*'s satire or *Marco*'s gore, *Turbo*'s stylized violence and moral vigilantism offer a moderate influence, balancing *RDX*'s intensity with humor. Compared to *Kannur Squad*'s systemic focus, it prioritizes family-driven justice, reinforcing its place in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID landscape (The News Minute, 2024a). Its impact in Kerala's youth mental health context warrants further study (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). In conclusion, *Turbo*'s moderate violence and heroic vigilantism, softened by humor, pose a balanced youth influence, modeling

protective aggression with limited desensitization risks. Its Kerala setting and family focus enhance appeal, potentially offering escapism or coping models for youth facing distress, distinguishing it from *Marco*'s excess (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

***Kannur Squad* (2023)**

Kannur Squad, directed by Roby Varghese Raj, premiered on September 28, 2023, as a Malayalam crime thriller, grossing over ₹80 crore and affirming its commercial success (The Hindu, 2023b). Starring Mammootty as George Martin, leader of an elite police unit, it follows their cross-India pursuit of political murderers, blending realism with sacrifice. Spanning Kerala's forests to the Indo-Nepal border, it contrasts *Marco*'s brutality and *Turbo*'s humor, earning praise for its "realistic cop drama" and "inspirational" narrative (The News Minute, 2023a; Mathrubhumi, 2023a). Mammootty's "iconic appeal" sets it apart from *Aavesham*'s satire (The Hindu, 2023b). With a 2-hour-41-minute runtime (161 minutes, verified via SRT) and a UA rating, it appeals to youth aged 13–25 through its grounded storytelling.

Violence averages ~6–7 incidents per hour across its 2-hour-41-minute runtime, aligning with *Bheeshma Parvam* but below *RDX*'s ~11–12/hour and *Marco*'s ~10–12/hour, with ~15 acts (The Hindu, 2022a; The Hindu, 2023b; The Hindu, 2024a). It features controlled beatings, hangings, and threats like "corpses soon," lacking *Marco*'s gore or *Turbo*'s humor (Mathrubhumi, 2024a; The News Minute, 2024a; Bushman & Anderson, 2009). Driven by duty and revenge—George's pursuit and a personal vendetta—it contrasts *RDX*'s family focus (The News Minute, 2023a). Violence is glorified with a duty-bound overlay, unlike *Marco*'s excess (Malayala Manorama, 2023a). *New Indian Express* (2023a) notes its restrained violence serves the plot, emphasizing narrative over sensationalism (New Indian Express, 2023a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) reports hanging as a prevalent suicide method (76.6%), suggesting cultural familiarity with violent imagery that *Kannur Squad* moderates (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality centers on murder, corruption, and organized crime, with political killings and bribery fueling George's mission (The Hindu, 2023b). It mirrors *Bheeshma Parvam*'s graft but contrasts *Aavesham*'s playfulness (The Hindu, 2022a; The News Minute, 2024a). Critics laud George's "noble pursuit," romanticizing duty while critiquing crime, unlike *Marco*'s unrestrained allure (Mathrubhumi, 2023a; Malayala Manorama, 2024a). This balance sets it apart from *Turbo*'s vigilantism (The News Minute, 2024a). *Indian Express* (2023a) highlights its solid yet conventional

procedural approach, reinforcing its systemic critique (Indian Express, 2023a).

Kannur Squad's influence on youth aged 13–25 is moderate, driven by Mammooty's star power and its UA-rated realism (The Hindu, 2023b). Social Learning Theory suggests George's rewarded pursuit models disciplined aggression, appealing to authority admiration (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1968). Cultivation Theory indicates its ~6–7/hour violence could normalize cop action, less intense than *RDX* (Gerbner et al., 1980; The News Minute, 2023b). Desensitization is minimal due to restraint, unlike *Marco*'s impact (Carnagey et al., 2007; The Hindu, 2024a). Its "iconic appeal" and "inspirational" tone risk imitation, moderated by realism, with relatable settings enhancing appeal (The Hindu, 2023b; Malayala Manorama, 2023a). It contrasts *Turbo*'s humor and *Aavesham*'s satire (The News Minute, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024c). *Times of India* (2023b) rates it 3.5/5 for its effective procedural focus, suggesting youth engagement through its grounded narrative (Times of India, 2023b). Kerala's suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021 exceeds the national average of 12.0, with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). Psychological distress (significant percentage), low education (62.4%), and interpersonal conflicts (31.3%) prevail, with 79.3% of victims having close family ties yet succumbing (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). *Kannur Squad*'s duty-driven narrative might resonate, modeling authority as coping, though its violence could normalize action for distressed youth (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

In conclusion, *Kannur Squad*'s moderate violence and heroic duty, tempered by moral clarity, pose a notable youth influence, modeling disciplined aggression with restraint. Its cop narrative distinguishes it from *Marco*'s brutality and *Bheeshma Parvam*'s gravitas, meriting further study in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID evolution given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (The News Minute, 2023a).

IV. DISCUSSION

This study of six Malayalam films offers a lens into the evolving portrayals of violence and criminality in contemporary Malayalam cinema (2021–2024) and their potential influence on young audiences aged 13–25. Grossing over ₹600 crore collectively, these films reflect a vibrant cinematic landscape shaped by genre diversity and cultural resonance, as evidenced by reviews in *The Hindu* (The Hindu, 2022a; The Hindu, 2023a; The Hindu, 2023b; The Hindu, 2024a; The Hindu, 2024b; The Hindu, 2024c). Rather than reiterating film-specific findings—such as *Marco*'s high violence frequency or *Aavesham*'s comedic

gangsterism—this discussion synthesizes overarching patterns, situates them within historical and global cinematic contexts, explores theoretical and societal implications, and reflects critically on the study's approach, contributing fresh insights to the discourse on media and youth in Kerala.

The films collectively reveal a spectrum of violence and criminality that mirrors Malayalam cinema's negotiation between spectacle and substance. Violence ranges from the intense, graphic brutality of *Marco* and *RDX* to the moderated, purpose-driven aggression of *Kannur Squad* and *Bheeshma Parvam*, with *Aavesham* and *Turbo* bridging these extremes through humor (The News Minute, 2024a). This gradient suggests a deliberate evolution: high-frequency action in *Marco* (10–12 incidents/hour) and *RDX* (11–12/hour) caters to visceral audience demands (The Hindu, 2024a; The Hindu, 2023a), while *Kannur Squad*'s restraint (6–7/hour) aligns with narrative depth (The Hindu, 2023b), reflecting a shift from action-heavy films to greater complexity (Nair, 2020). Criminality similarly spans archetypes—gangsterism in *Aavesham*, *Marco*, and *Bheeshma Parvam* contrasts vigilantism in *RDX*, *Turbo*, and *Kannur Squad*—with portrayals oscillating between romanticization and critique (Mathrubhumi, 2024a). *Marco*'s unapologetic avenger and *Aavesham*'s charming don elevate crime as aspirational (The News Minute, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024a), while *Kannur Squad*'s noble cop and *Turbo*'s heroic everyman anchor it in justice (The News Minute, 2023a; The News Minute, 2024a).

This synthesis reveals a dual trend: violence and criminality are tools for both entertainment and commentary. The high-intensity films (*Marco*, *RDX*) prioritize spectacle, resonating with Kerala's youth seeking adrenaline-fueled escapism amid post-COVID uncertainties (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023), while moderated portrayals (*Bheeshma Parvam*, *Kannur Squad*) weave emotional or societal stakes, appealing to viewers valuing narrative substance (The Hindu, 2022a; The Hindu, 2023b). Humor in *Aavesham* and *Turbo* softens aggression, suggesting a hybrid approach that balances mass appeal with restraint (Malayala Manorama, 2024a; Malayala Manorama, 2024b). These patterns indicate Malayalam cinema's adaptability, catering to diverse audience segments—action enthusiasts, narrative seekers, and casual viewers—within a single cultural framework (The News Minute, 2024a).

The influence on youth emerges as a continuum, shaped by these portrayals. High-frequency, unrestrained violence (*Marco*, *RDX*) risks modeling extreme aggression, while moderated, contextualized acts (*Kannur Squad*, *Bheeshma Parvam*) suggest disciplined responses, moderated further by humor (*Turbo*, *Aavesham*) (The News Minute, 2024a;

The News Minute, 2024b). Critical reception amplifies this—*Marco*’s “ferocious appeal” and *RDX*’s “cool factor” contrast *Kannur Squad*’s “inspirational” tone and *Turbo*’s mass appeal (Mathrubhumi, 2023a)—hinting at varied youth responses, from imitation to admiration (Mathrubhumi, 2024a; The Hindu, 2023b). This continuum underscores a tension: entertainment value drives influence, but narrative intent modulates its direction, a dynamic ripe for deeper exploration (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Situating these films within Malayalam cinema’s history reveals a lineage of violence and criminality evolving from archetype-driven action to nuanced storytelling. The 1990s saw heroes like Suresh Gopi’s *Commissioner* delivering raw justice against systemic foes, a precursor to *RDX* and *Turbo*’s vigilantism (The Hindu, 1994). The 2000s introduced gangster epics (e.g., *Chotta Mumbai*), echoed in *Aavesham* and *Bheeshma Parvam*’s underworld charm, while post-2010 “New Generation” cinema (e.g., *Kumbalangi Nights*) emphasized realism, paving the way for *Kannur Squad*’s gritty duty (Nair, 2020). This progression reflects a response to Kerala’s shifting socio-cultural landscape—economic growth, urban youth culture, and post-COVID resilience—where violence transitions from cathartic release to narrative vehicle (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Globally, parallels emerge with Western and Asian cinema, enriching this context. *Marco*’s visceral revenge mirrors Tarantino’s *Kill Bill*, yet its Kerala rooting adds familial stakes absent in Hollywood’s individualism (The News Minute, 2024a). *RDX*’s martial action recalls Hong Kong’s *Ip Man*, but its church festival setting ties it to Kerala’s communal ethos (Mathrubhumi, 2023a). *Kannur Squad*’s cop pursuit echoes *The Departed*, though its cross-India chase reflects India’s federal complexity (The Hindu, 2023b). *Aavesham*’s comedic gangsterism aligns with *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, yet its college backdrop localizes it (The Hindu, 2024b). *Turbo* and *Bheeshma Parvam* blend Bollywood’s mass-hero flair with Kerala’s grounded storytelling, distinguishing them from Hindi cinema’s urban bias (Malayala Manorama, 2024a). These parallels highlight Malayalam cinema’s hybridity—global influences melded with regional identity—driven by stars like Mammooty, whose “iconic” versatility bridges eras (The Hindu, 2023b).

Culturally, the films reflect Kerala’s duality: a progressive state with traditional roots. *Bheeshma Parvam*’s Kochi underworld and *RDX*’s festival clashes mirror urban-rural tensions, while *Kannur Squad*’s policing critiques real-world law enforcement debates (Nair, 2020). *Turbo*’s Idukki hero and *Aavesham*’s Bengaluru shift tap into

Kerala’s diaspora and youth mobility (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). This localization—unlike Bollywood’s metropolitan focus—enhances relatability, amplifying influence on Kerala’s 13–25 demographic, who see their lives reflected in these narratives (The News Minute, 2024a).

Theoretically, these films engage Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), and desensitization research (Carnagey et al., 2007) in nuanced ways. Bandura’s modeling suggests *Marco*’s unrestrained aggression and *RDX*’s martial feats could inspire imitation among youth navigating identity crises (Erikson, 1968), while *Turbo*’s protective vigilantism and *Kannur Squad*’s disciplined duty model socially sanctioned responses (The Hindu, 2024c; Mathrubhumi, 2023a). *Aavesham*’s comedic flair and *Bheeshma Parvam*’s authoritative restraint moderate this, suggesting context shapes behavior adoption (The Hindu, 2024b; Mathrubhumi, 2022a). Cultivation Theory posits *Marco* and *RDX*’s high violence normalize aggression more than *Kannur Squad*’s restraint, with *Turbo* and *Aavesham*’s humor diluting long-term effects (The News Minute, 2024b; Malayala Manorama, 2024a). Desensitization risks peak with *Marco*’s gore, lessen with *RDX*’s stylization, and minimize with *Bheeshma Parvam*’s narrative focus, highlighting violence type’s role (Carnagey et al., 2007; The Hindu, 2024a).

Societally, these portrayals intersect with Kerala’s youth culture and media landscape. *Marco*’s brutality and *RDX*’s action may fuel aggression in a state with high suicide rates (27.2 per lakh in 2021) and youth distress (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021), while *Kannur Squad*’s duty reinforces trust in institutions amid policing debates (Nair, 2020). *Turbo* and *Aavesham*’s humor could bolster resilience, countering violence’s edge (Malayala Manorama, 2024a), yet *Bheeshma Parvam*’s gangster allure risks glamorizing underworld life in urbanizing Kochi (The Hindu, 2022a). These dynamics suggest a dual impact: reinforcing cultural values (family, duty) while challenging social norms (vigilantism, crime), necessitating media literacy to mitigate risks (Potter, 2012). Kerala’s high literacy and cinema engagement amplify this influence, with OTT platforms extending reach beyond theaters (The News Minute, 2024a).

Policy implications emerge—e.g., integrating media education to decode *Marco*’s allure or *Kannur Squad*’s duty, countering modeling risks (Bandura, 1977). Youth programs could leverage *Turbo*’s resilience themes, while regulators might monitor *RDX*’s vigilante appeal, balancing entertainment with social good (Kerala State Youth

Commission, 2023). This positions Malayalam cinema as both a mirror and shaper of Kerala's youth psyche, warranting further study (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Reflecting on this study, the qualitative, thematic approach captures depth—violence's spectrum, criminality's archetypes, influence's nuances—yet its subjectivity limits generalizability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A quantitative supplement (e.g., violence counts vs. youth surveys) could enhance precision, though time constraints favored depth over breadth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus on six films reflects mainstream trends but omits niche genres (e.g., *Minnal Murali*'s superheroism), a deliberate choice to prioritize cultural impact (The Hindu, 2024a). Gender representation—a gap in these male-centric narratives—merits critique; female roles (e.g., Elsa in *Bheeshma Parvam*) are marginal, echoing Mulvey's (1975) gaze critique, suggesting a future lens (Mulvey, 1975).

Future research could explore OTT's role—e.g., *Aavesham*'s streaming reach vs. *Marco*'s theatrical shock—using viewership data (Potter, 2012). Longitudinal studies on Kerala youth post-exposure (e.g., aggression after *RDX*, duty after *Kannur Squad*) could test theoretical predictions (Bandura, 1977). Comparative analyses with Tamil or Bollywood cinema (e.g., *Vikram*, *Jawan*) might reveal regional distinctions, while gender-focused studies could unpack female agency in violence narratives (Potter, 2012). This study thus opens a dialogue on Malayalam cinema's role (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

V. CONCLUSION

This study of six Malayalam films—*Aavesham* (2024), *Marco* (2024), *Bheeshma Parvam* (2022), *RDX: Robert Dony Xavier* (2023), *Turbo* (2024), and *Kannur Squad* (2023)—explores the dynamic interplay of violence and criminality in contemporary Malayalam cinema (2021–2024) and their potential influence on youth aged 13–25. Collectively grossing over ₹600 crore, these films underscore their commercial potency and cultural resonance, as evidenced by critical reviews (The Hindu, 2022a; The Hindu, 2023a; The Hindu, 2023b; The Hindu, 2024a; The Hindu, 2024b; The Hindu, 2024c). The analysis reveals a violence spectrum from *Marco*'s graphic brutality to *Kannur Squad*'s measured realism, mirrored by criminal portrayals ranging from romanticized gangsterism to righteous vigilantism. Through synthesis, historical and global contextualization, and examination of theoretical and societal implications, this study offers a nuanced perspective on how these films shape Kerala's young audiences.

Malayalam cinema's adaptability shines through its ability to balance spectacle and substance, engaging diverse youth demographics. High-intensity violence in *Marco* and *RDX* captivates thrill-seekers craving escapism, while *Aavesham* and *Turbo* leverage humor to widen appeal, and *Bheeshma Parvam* and *Kannur Squad* deliver narrative depth for those prizing meaning over excess (Mathrubhumi, 2024a). Criminality—glamorized in *Aavesham*'s charismatic don and *Marco*'s tragic avenger, yet grounded in *Turbo*'s heroic everyman and *Kannur Squad*'s dutiful cop—reflects Kerala's socio-cultural duality, merging progressive aspirations with traditional values (Nair, 2020). This versatility fuels a varied influence: *Marco*'s unrestrained aggression poses the greatest risk of modeling behavior, tempered by *Turbo*'s comedic lens and *Kannur Squad*'s moral framework, as illuminated by Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1980). Critical reception underscores this spectrum, juxtaposing *Marco*'s “ferocious appeal” with *Kannur Squad*'s “inspirational” ethos (The News Minute, 2023a).

Positioned as a cultural artifact, Malayalam cinema both mirrors and molds Kerala's youth, evolving from 1990s action archetypes to 2020s nuanced tales, paralleling global cinematic trends—such as Tarantino's visceral intensity or Hong Kong's martial artistry—while retaining a regional identity through local settings and stars like Mammooty (The Hindu, 2022a). Societally, these films straddle entertainment and influence, necessitating media literacy to mitigate desensitization risks (Carnagey et al., 2007) while amplifying resilience and duty as positive takeaways (Malayala Manorama, 2024a). This duality demands attention from educators, policymakers, and filmmakers to harness cinema's potential responsibly, particularly given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

The study's qualitative approach, while rich in thematic depth, limits generalizability, and its male-centric focus overlooks female perspectives, echoing Mulvey's (1975) critique (Mulvey, 1975). Future inquiries could probe OTT platforms' reach—such as *Aavesham*'s streaming impact—or track longitudinal youth responses, incorporating quantitative data (Potter, 2012). Comparative analyses with Tamil or Bollywood cinema could further highlight regional nuances. Ultimately, this study affirms Malayalam cinema's power to entertain, challenge, and shape, providing a robust foundation for understanding its role in Kerala's cultural and social fabric, with broader implications for media scholarship and youth development in a digital era (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

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